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HUMAN AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF URBANIZATION: CHANGES IN TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS AND FORMS OF CULTURAL ENJOYMENT

Prepared by the Department of Cultural Activities, UNESCO

Cities are seldom planned from the start. They are gradual growths. This growth is partly "natural", that is, it is the expansion of a group of living beings who are themselves growing, reproducing, and producing and whose labours yield cumulative results. But the growth of cities is not merely this internal expansiveness of living beings; it is also a process of accretion. People with diverse village backgrounds and habits are urbanized; they are literally made-over, reconstructed. The kind of problems which our studies have attempted to deal with are the problems arising from this latter process - the urbanization of villagers, the transformation of their occupations, homes, habits, interests, ideas and arts. This process is not growth in the biological sense, but reorientation in the cultural sense. The problems involve disruptions of social relations, dislocation of interests and standards, multiplication of opportunities and new social contacts. An individual or a family in becoming urbanized and industrialized is a recreated being. Gradually, and often painfully, new ways of life, new culture patterns are

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established. The resources for happiness of an urban community are certainly greater in variety and in inherent appeal than are those of impoverished villages, but the problems connected with the rational use of these resources so that they in fact create the happiness of its citizens are enormously complicated. And the complications are not only economic and administrative, they are also psychologic New habits must be formed, new skills acquired. The minds and morals of the citizens must be adjusted to the new environment and to its opportunities for the enrichment of freedom. In short, such urbanization involves a cultural crisis and revolution. There is no general formula for describing such crises and revolutions; they create problems which are local and intensely personal. Hence, the need for studying a variety of local transformation among urbanized villagers.

Culture is, strictly speaking, a quality of life, but this quality is institutionalised both in its origins and in its expressions. Folkways are continually molded by established folk-arts; moral standards are practical norms when they have the support of customary or legal sanctions; attitudes of praise and blame are transformed by various social agencies into organized supports for publicly recognized values and goals. It is therefore impossible theoretically to separate cultural problems from social problems and it is obviously necessary for UNESCO in its programme to approach such problems in terms of the functioning of established institutions in community life.

In this sense, any culture is "traditional" - it is something established, enduring, connecting the life of succeeding generations. But when we use the term "traditional culture" in the context of this Conference, we have something more specific in mind. In many countries the chief developments of industrialization are of foreign origin: they are <u>imported</u> into cultures and must be adapted to the traditional ways and institutions of the peoples. Hence, in connection with several projects dealing with South-East Asia, the term "traditional culture" applied in these countries, has proved to be a convenient label for all those aspects of community life, which were well established before the industrial revolution made its impact. To certain readers the use of this term has been misleading, for it has given the impression that the UNESCO studies of the present cultural life of village and urban communities in South-East Asia has been biassed; they believe that it is assumed that the impact of the foreign technologies have been culturally

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destructive, that the traditional arts must be preserved and defended at all costs. Such traditionalist attitudes are not in fact an element in our programme, and no value judgment is involved in our use of the term; we need a convenient descriptive label for the non-industrial habits, arts, and institutions. Though many of these are in fact "endangered" and though most of them are being transformed to a revolutionary extent, there is no implication in our approach that everything that is endangered should be protected or preserved. Our study is an attempt to get a detailed factual picture of the inter-action between old and new elements in contemporary life. This includes, of course, as a very important aspect of the problem, the inter-action of old and new values; for these are not static and their re-creation or reformation is a central feature of the conscious cultural concerns of any generation, notably the present.

There is, however, one aspect of traditional cultures which we have singled out for special consideration and which involves a value judgment. The traditional or "folk" arts and crafts are extremely diversified, reflecting local patterns, individual skills, and stylized tastes. Modern industrial production, especially in its early stages, has a tendency to bring about standardized, mass production, in which these local diversities disappear or are, at least, greatly reduced. It would be absurd to condemn industrial production on this account, but it is not absurd to have a concern for the consequent corruption and disorientation of communities and cultures. Hence a number of our investigators and advisers, who have made studies of villages undergoing industrialization, have called our attention to the importance of dealing constructively with this problem. In what follows there will be illustrations of attempts to make constructive use in industry of folk arts and designs and tastes; also, to use industrial techniques to enhance the traditional arts instead of undermining them. The attempts to preserve and strengthen the diversities of cultural expression is not an attempt coming from UNESCO, it is a very prevalent aim and concern of Asian educators and statesmen. This is not propaganda for any particular folk-art, nor is it an attempt to stop progress in technical production by favouring antiquated skills. It is simply a very general, reasonable interest in fostering social changes which will stimulate local and individual creativity instead of those which frustrate existing

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skills by imposing arts and ideals not in conformity with existing personality structures and the actual social environment.

OUTLINE OF ACTIVITIES

With this as an introduction to the aims of our projects, we may present our various activities under two general heads:

A. Studies of the diversity of traditional cultures. These are efforts to collect samples from various regions of how the traditional arts, ideas, tastes, values are faring under contemporary conditions: (a) in village communities which are relatively untouched by industrialization; (b) in urban communities where the inter-action between tradition and technology is conspicuous.

B. Experiments in promoting international community and understanding by aiding the travel of students, scholars, artists from one country to another; by translating important works of literature into other languages; by facilitating the international exchange of works of art, science, and humanistic endeavour. These are not experiments in creating a single world-culture: on the contrary, they are experiments in sharing a great variety of cultural goods and interests across great distances of space and time. They are intended to create resources for the enrichment of any culture by introducing into it the achievements of other cultures.

A.

First, an outline of our studies of cultural diversity in local communities. The members of this Conference are aware of the work of the United Nations and ECAFE and other institutions, notably of the national governments, in studying the economic effects of industrialization and in creating "community centres" for industrial communities which, being new, had little opportunity for community life and expression. The first concerns of these programmes for community development were the building and equipping of schools, libraries, theatres, museums, playgrounds. By "first concerns" we mean "first cultural concerns", for even these institutions had had to wait until the "basic" needs of food, shelter, health, security were given a minimum satisfaction. The projects of the Department of Cultural Activities have been designed to supplement these basic concerns by showing

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concretely how even these most basic needs are shaped by traditional cultural institutions. In villages this is so obvious that there is not much need for insisting on the inter-relation of economic and cultural factors in community health and development. But in urban communities undergoing industrialization the problem is complex. There is a greater need for learning new trades, professions, philosophies, politics, etc. There is a greater demand for modern libraries, museums, theatres, in general for well-equipped cultural centres, either national or municipal. In these urban cultural centres there are gathered the various attempts to adapt the traditional and the new elements to each other. In the new city of Chandigarh the opportunity offered by international planning for an up-to-date cultural centre for the Indian Punjab has attracted UNESCO's attention, but not much has been accomplished as yet. On the other hand, the Public Library at Delhi, a UNESCO Pilot Project, is a spectacular success and illustrates admirably what can be done in the way of bringing the old and the new together. This modern Public Library serves 70,000 men, women and children a month and in five years has lent well over a million books. Popular features of the Library's programme are its group activities - lectures, discussions, film showings, story hours for children, etc. - and its book-mobile service to the outskirts of Delhi and nearly villages. A recent evaluation brought out the startling fact that 26 per cent of the Library's 20,000 readers did not read at all before joining the Library and 50 per cent have no book whatever at home - clear evidence that this Library fills a real need. The new Municipal Museum and Culture Centre of Ahmedabad is another example of what can be done, and the Director of this Centre, Mr. Prithwi S. Neogy, is engaged (in co-operation with UNESCO) in making a survey of the village cultures in the neighbourhood of Ahmedabad, in order to estimate the practical possibilities of using the Ahmedabad Museum as a centre for the surrounding villages as well. Similar inquiries are going on, as part of the UNESCO programme, in Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia.

The most systematic project in connection with the "cultural community centre" aspect of our programme is the organization of a series of Seminars on this subject in several typical University cities. These seminars were planned and carried out by local committees composed of members of the Universities and of leading citizens of the cities in which the meetings took place. The first of the

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seminars was held in February 1956 in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, the last will be held during next October and November. The cities which have participated are: Calcutta, Delhi, Jodhpur, Madras and Waltair - India; Dacca, Lahore and Karachi - Pakistan; Rangoon in Burma; Jogjakarta in Indonesia and Kandy (Peradeniya) in Ceylon. Only partial reports are available at the time this is being written, but further information regarding their results will be available at the time of the Bangkok Urbanization Seminar. At these seminars, communications were received on the present problems faced by folk arts, traditional music and dance, traditional religious observances, traditional scholarship, etc.; plans were formulated for the creation or expansion of cultural institutes, for programmes of adult education outside the universities, for community centres for the cultivation of the fine arts and of traditional interests. In making its contribution toward the planning and holding of these seminars, UNESCO is attempting to get substantial information from typical urban communities, regarding the most urgent cultural needs and goals of communities of South-East Asia. How much attention will be given to problems directly related to industrialization and urbanization is still unknown, but it is safe to predict on the basis of preliminary reports that the impacts of modern industry on the traditional home, the status of women, the scope of professional education, the intellectual interests of the people, etc. are being analysed, and that constructive efforts are being made to deal with the local problems created by the inroads of industry on traditional ways of life and thought.

The programme of studies for 1957-58 involves, first of all, a continuation of the planning of cultural centres in South-East Asia not only through continued study of the cultural needs of urban communities, but also through providing aid in the form of fellowships, experts, and cultural materials to communities which request such aid, especially to those cities in which plans for cultural centres were formulated during the 1955-56 University Conferences.

B. International Community and Cultural Centres

These seminars, however, also serve to introduce the second major aspect of our programme in this field - the concern for international cultural relations. The more or less standardized techniques and sciences of modern industry and machinery have obviously promoted an international community of knowledge, skills,

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technical organizations and an exchange on a world-wide scale of technical news and products. A university is by its very nature a centre for this international community of knowledge, and hence the University Seminars are attempts to make available to urban, industrial communities some of the benefits of international exchange which are to be found in any university worthy of the name. Our concern for the cultural expansion of these international centres of knowledge is not so much for the technological knowledge afforded by world-wide industrial enterprise, but rather for the less technological or so-called "human" values. Our aim is to help in making the diversity of cultures an international asset instead of a liability. By using modern, industrial means, we can make available to almost any culture the great achievements of each. There is a world-wide patrimony of human achievement, which exists as so much cultural capital for mankind; but only a fraction of this capital has been effectively employed so far. The problem of making available to communities throughout the world the benefits of education, art, science, religion, and culture generally, in all their individuality and impressive variety is, first of all, an economic and industrial problem; it poses a task for modern devices of mass communication and international distribution. Without the great inventions which modern industry has put into our hands, the world-wide use of mankind's cultural capital would remain an idle dream. Obstacles still abound - obstacles of language, transportation, understanding, and limitations of information, imagination, and appreciation - but with modern means many of these traditional obstacles can be greatly reduced.

UNESCO is only one of many international agencies which have succeeded in promoting greater exchange of works of art, more translations of important literature, better interpretations of foreign ideas, more tolerant tastes, more informed judgments. But so far there has been only a bare beginning of this programme of world-wide community, when seen from the perspective of its possible development. Once the keeping of the peace becomes less absorbing and expensive, the funds that can be freed for the promotion of this community of man's varied cultures will be of a magnitude to challenge our imagination and our practical programmes. Planning for this future development, making pilot projects and experiments in this field is no longer "idealism" in the romantic sense; it is the very commonest sense. For

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there is no sense in limiting our industrial resources to the satisfaction of our animal wants, and there is no intelligible way of drawing a line between man's economic needs and his cultural wants. An economy is a cultural instrument; and this elementary fact is now recognized not only by the planners of "welfare states" but by anyone who reflects on the industrial capacity for the enrichment of our traditional arts and cherished values.